

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2701
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0096

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MOPS, LE, SY, KU, EG, SA
SUBJECT: SARKIS AND QUADRIpartite COMMITTEE ACT TO EXPEL PALESTINIAN
REGULARS AND COLLECT HEAVY WEAPONS

1. SUMMARY. IN A MAJOR DECISION, THE ARAB LEAGUE
"QUADRIpartite COMMITTEE," CHAIRED BY PRESIDENT SARKIS, HAS
ANNOUNCED A DEADLINE MIDNIGHT JAN 12 FOR PALESTINIAN "REGULAR
FORCES" TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY AND FOR THE COLLECTION OF HEAVY
WEAPONS. THE ARAB SECURITY FORCES ARE AUTHORIZED TO USE
FORCE THEREAFTER. SOME 2000-4000 PALESTINIANS MAY BE
AFFECTED. THE DECISION RE PALESTINIAN FORCES COMES AS
SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE, BUT THE DECISION ON HEAVY WEAPONS
HAS LONG BEEN EXPECTED. IT COMES JUST BEFORE THE END
OF THE 90-DAY PERIOD ESTABLISHED BY THE OCTOBER CAIRO
SUMMIT. FOR SARKIS, THE MOVE COMES JUST AS HIS HOLD
ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION WAS BEGINNING TO SLIP. END SUMMARY.
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2. SARKIS AND QUADRIpartite COMMITTEE DECIDE. AFTER A MEETING
OF THE SYRIAN-SAUDI-EGYPTIAN-KUWAITI QUADRIpartite COMMITTEE
CHAIRED BY PRESIDENT SARKIS THE MORNING OF JAN 7, THE LEBANESE
PRESIDENCY ISSUED FOLLOWING STATEMENT (SUBSTANTIVE PORTION, BASED
ON INFORMAL EMBASSY TRANSLATION FROM L'ORIENT-LE JOUR JAN 8 AS
FOLLOWS):

QUOTE IT HAS BEEN DECIDED...TO ESTABLISH MIDNIGHT, WEDNESDAY, JAN 12, AS THE DEADLINE FOR THE STORING AT DEFINITELY SELECTED LOCATIONS OF THE HEAVY WEAPONS IN THE HANDS OF THE VARIOUS LEBANESE FACTIONS AND THE PALESTINIANS. THE ARAB STRIKE FORCE ("FORCE DE FRAPPE ARABE") IS CHARGED WITH THE SUPERVISION OF THE EXECUTION OF THIS OPERATION, AND, IF NEED BE, TO CARRY OUT THE NECESSARY SEARCHES TO SEIZE THE HEAVY WEAPONS WHICH IT MIGHT DISCOVER OUTSIDE OF THE SELECTED LOCATIONS AFTER THE DEADLINE.

IT HAS BEEN FURTHERMORE DECIDED TO ASSERT THE NECESSITY THAT REGULAR PALESTINIAN FORCES SHOULD LEAVE LEBANESE TERRITORY BY THE SAME DATE; THE ARAB STRIKE FORCE IS CHARGED WITH THE APPLICATION OF THIS DECISION AND IS TO TAKE ALL THE NECESSARY STEPS REQUIRED TO THIS END.

THE (QUADRIPARTITE) COMMITTEE WILL MEET AGAIN UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE CHIEF OF STATE ON THURSDAY, JAN 13, 1977, TO REVIEW THE EXECUTION OF THESE DECISIONS AND TO CONTINUE TO EXAMINE MEASURES NECESSARY FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS (OF 1969).
END QUOTE.

3. WHO ARE THE "REGULAR PALESTINIAN FORCES?" THE EXACT NUMBER OF PALESTINIANS WHO COULD BE DEFINED AS "REGULAR FORCES" IN LEBANON IS DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE. FORCES OR ELEMENTS THEREOF KNOWN TO HAVE RECENTLY BEEN OPERATING IN LEBANON INCLUDE THE FATAH "YARMUK BRIGADE" (700), THE SYRIAN-CONTROLLED SAIQA (2000), AND THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ARMY (PLA) -- MOSTLY ORGANIZED IN THE HITTAH BRIGADE (900), THE QADISIYYA BRIGADE (700), THE REMNANTS OF THE AIN JALLUT
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BRIGADE, ALONG WITH ITS PALESTINIAN LIBERATION FRONT (PLF) GUERRILLA ARM (1500).

4. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT SYRIA WILL ALLOW SAIQA TO BE CONSIDERED A REGULAR FORCE AND FORCED TO LEAVE LEBANON. (IT HAS ONLY RECENTLY COME BACK INTO LEBANON IN FORCE.) TOTAL REGULAR PALESTINIAN FORCES WHICH SHOULD LEAVE LEBANON UNDER THE DECISION AS WRITTEN, EXCLUDING SAIQA, IS THEREFORE ESTIMATED AT APPROXIMATELY 4000.

5. THE DECISION ON DEPARTURE OF "REGULAR FORCES" IS BEING INTERPRETED IN SOME QUARTERS AS APPLYING PRIMARILY TO THOSE CONVENTIONAL FORCES WHICH WERE BASED IN SYRIA AND EGYPT BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. THUS A "FIRST PHASE" MIGHT BE DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY AT APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE FORCES LISTED IN PARA 3.

6. COMMENT: THE DECISION ON DEPARTURE OF THE "REGULAR FORCES" COMES AS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE. ALTHOUGH IN RESPONSE TO A BASIC DEMAND OF LONG STANDING OF THE KFUJ FRONT, THERE HAVE BEEN NO RECENT

INDICATIONS THAT SUCH A STEP, UNDER QUADRIpartite AUSPICES, WAS IMMINENT. IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW ALL THESE FORCES CAN LEAVE LEBANON BEFORE THE DEADLINE.

7. THE ANNOUNCEMENT ON HEAVY WEAPONS COLLECTION, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS LONG OVERDUE. EVER SINCE THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE ARAB SECURITY FORCES ("ARAB STRIKE FORCE") ALONG THE COAST AND IN THE MAJOR CITIES OF LEBANON IN MID-NOVEMBER, THE QUESTION OF HEAVY WEAPONS COLLECTION HAS BEEN UNDER INTENSIVE DISCUSSION. THE LEBANESE LIAISON STAFF OF THE ASF UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF COL AL-HAJJ UNDERTOOK INTENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE VARIOUS GROUPS TO ARRANGE A PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY OF HEAVY WEAPONS. THE PLAN SEEMED TO SETTLE ON A "TWO LOCK" SYSTEM, WITH THE WEAPONS TO BE ASSEMBLED AT A NUMBER OF DESIGNATED LOCATIONS UNDER THE GUARD OF BOTH THE RELEVANT MILITIA GROUPS AND THE ASF. BOT H THE NATIONAL LIBERALS AND JUNBLATTIS EVENTUALLY PRODUCED WHAT PURPORTED TO BE LISTS OF THEIR HEAVY WEAPONS, WHICH WERE RIDICULOUSLY CONFIDENTIAL

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SMALL. IT APPEARS THAT EVEN THE RELATIVE "DOVES" ON THE QUADRIpartite COMMITTEE, EGYPT AND KUWAIT, HAVE NOW REALIZED THAT THE MOMENT FOR DECISIVE ACTION, BY FORCE IF NECESSARY, HAS FINALLY ARRIVED. THE DECISION COMES JUST AS THE 90-DAY PERIOD ESTABLISHED BY THE CAIRO SUMMIT IN OCTOBER FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS OWN DECISIONS AND RE-APPLICATION OF THE 1969 CAIRO ACCORDS, IS ABOUT TO EXPIRE.

8. FOR PRESIDENT SARKIS, THE DECISION COMES NONE TOO SOON: HIS CONTROL OF THE SITUATION WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY TENUOUS. THE MAJOR EXPLOSION IN EAST BEIRUT EARLIER IN THE WEEK (SEPTELS) GAVE CHRISTIAN HARDLINERS THE PRETEXT THEY SOUGHT TO BEGIN TO RESUME THE LOCAL SECURITY ROLE THEY ONLY RELUCTANTLY CEDED TO THE SYRIANS TWO MONTHS AGO. FOR THE FIRST TIME, SARKIS IS UNDERTAKING A DECISIVE STEP IN THE FACE OF THE VITAL VESTED INTERESTS OF AN ARMED GROUP IN LEBANON. IF IT WORKS, HE WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO MOVE TOWARD S REESTABLISHING A NATIONAL LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE AND A NATIONAL ARMY.
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